

Sick Simba

Story: Sick Simba

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7855872/1/>

Category: Lion King

Genre: Adventure/Romance

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Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3365186/>

Last updated: 02/24/2012

Words: 12750

Rating: T

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 7 of 7 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Simba falls terminally ill, and Nala is forced to come to terms with the fact that he will die. Unless, of course, a certain someone can provide the cure...

***Chapter 1*: Chapter 1: The Story of How Simba Died**

AN: You like sad stories? Well... this one is rather heartbreaking. But sadness is good for the soul, right? Or maybe it'll just make you cry your eyes out. Either way I've done my job. So go and get your heart broken. You'll thank me later.

Sick Simba

Chapter One: The Story of How Simba Died

When I met Simba, I thought everything would be okay. I thought it would be all right in the end. I'd settle down with the best mate in the world, have a cub, and live out the rest of my happy life in peace. That's what I thought. But then Simba started coughing. Then came the illness. And that's when it all ended.

This is the story of how Simba died.

"Okay!" Simba exclaimed, hopping out of the den eagerly. "I'm ready for adventure! How are the bad guys going to try and kill us today?"

"You have a very positive way of thinking about things, Simba," Nala told him, joining him by his side. "Do you *always* think we're gonna get killed every time we go outside?"

Simba grinned and shook his head. "No. Sometimes I think that just *one* of us is gonna get killed," he said with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, very funny," Nala said, rolling her eyes. "So... what life-threatening location are we gonna be visiting today? The Lava Pits of Death or the River of Eternal Doom? I think it's your turn to choose today."

"Hmm... so many options," he replied, faking a thoughtful look. This caused both of them to burst out laughing at their joke. Simba started coughing while he laughed, and soon stopped, looking mildly confused. "Anyway..." Simba headed away, motioning for Nala to follow. "Come on. I want to show you something."

Simba started making his way down Pride Rock, with Nala walking right alongside him. "What do you want to show me, Simba?"

"It's a surprise," he replied, grinning. "And it's a cool surprise."

"Will I really like it?" Nala asked, wondering what Simba had planned for her this time. He was always doing things like this – showing her cool places and exciting things to do. He was the greatest person she'd ever met, and she was going to stay with him for ever.

"Of course you'll like it, Nala," he replied, his grin widening. She loved that grin. It was full of enthusiasm and energy – which perfectly summed Simba up. He was so fun to be with! "Would I give you a surprise if I knew you wouldn't like it?"

"Uh, *yeah!*" Nala exclaimed, smiling at him. "Remember the other night when you pulled me into the water hole, scaring the life out of me? Oh, yeah, that was really cool, Simba. Jeez, I think I'm more scared of the dark than *you* now!"

"Oh..." Simba said, looking down at the ground. "You won't like the surprise, then – if you're scared of the dark."

Nala rolled her eyes and put a paw around his shoulder, pulling him close to her. "Come on, Simba! I'm only kidding! I don't care if the surprise is in the dark... for whatever reason that is."

"Oh, cool," Simba said. "For a second there you had me scared. Because to show you this surprise we have to go into a pretty dark cave."

"Two experiences with the dark in two days," Nala noted. "Simba, you're facing your fears pretty well. I knew you could do it if you tried. You shouldn't worry so much."

Simba shrugged and started walking again. "Ah, well, there's a lot of pressure on me. I have to keep my reputation as the heroic Prince of the Pride Lands!"

"*Us*, Simba," Nala added. "There's a lot of pressure on *us*. The heroic Prince and *Princess* of the Pride Lands. Unless, of course, you've suddenly changed your mind and don't want me to be your Princess anymore."

"Don't be silly, Nala. You'll be my Princess until we become the King and Queen! We're a team, right?" Simba asked.

Nala licked his cheek in response. "Yeah," she said, giggling. "We're a team. The best team in the world!"

"And no one can split us up?" said Simba, grinning.

Nala grinned back. "Nobody." Nala walked ahead of Simba, still grinning. "Come on, Simba. I bet I can find out where the surprise is before you do."

"No way!" Simba declared, bounding after her. "It's in such a secret place that you'll never ever find out where it is!"

"Okay, so where is it?"

"Oh, it's in that cave right at the bottom of the gorge—" Simba slapped a paw to his mouth, but it was far too late. Nala knew where her surprise was, and she was going to do everything to make sure she got there before Simba did.

"Race ya!" Nala challenged, before running off, racing past a shocked Simba. "You're not gonna get very far if you don't move your legs!"

Simba laughed in response, before chasing after Nala. *She is so getting tickled when I win this race*, he thought with a smile, running as fast as his legs would carry him. After all the adventures he'd had, running was pretty much one of Simba's strongest skills. When he wasn't terrified of the next person who was trying to kill him, that is.

The Prince of the Pride Lands found himself running for his life quite a lot. The most recent time that sprang to mind was when Tama had been turned into a vampire, and he found himself on the receiving end of her sharp, menacing fangs. It was lucky that sunlight arrived to vanquish her curse before she could turn him into a vampire, too. Tama did manage to bite him on the neck, but Simba doubted that he would turn into a monster anytime soon.

Suddenly, Simba found himself coughing again. His pace began to slow, as his chest started aching. *What the...?* Simba exclaimed in his mind, looking down at his chest as he ran. *Jeez, what is it with this cough? It won't stop.* Simba continued to cough, harder and harder each time, before it suddenly stopped, just as suddenly as it began. *Weird...* Simba thought, as his pace quickened and he found himself catching up with Nala again, passing her with ease. "You're too slow, Nala!"

Nala's eyes widened when she saw Simba rush past in a golden blur. "But, how did you...?" Nala exclaimed, surprised. "Oh, I should expect it from you by now," she muttered, before running even faster, eager to beat him to the location of her surprise.

That was the thing with Simba. He was always full of surprises. You could never tell what he was going to do next, since he was so goofy and full of energy. Nala never ever thought she would get bored of him. Every morning she woke up there was always something new to do as long as Simba was around.

However, Nala had no idea that it wouldn't be much longer before Simba disappeared from her life for ever.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Tama's Good Side

Chapter Two: Tama's Good Side

"All I'm saying is that you should try being a good person for once," Tojo told Tama, as they sat underneath a tree, bathing in the shade that protected them from the immense heat of the sun.

Tama gave him a funny look, and scoffed. "Keep dreaming, Tojo. I'm not cut out to be a good person. I told you my story, didn't I? I tried to be good, and look what happened to me – I was nearly beaten to death by my own father. I promised myself that day that I was never ever going to be good again. I don't want anything like that to ever happen to me again. I'm going to be like the rest of my family – evil to the very end."

"I think you're a good person, Tama," Tojo admitted. "I think deep down there's a little part of you that wants to be the good person you know you are. If you look hard enough, then you'll find the good part of you."

Tama stared at Tojo for a few seconds, and realised that he was being serious. And just for a second – a tiny, insignificant second – Tama felt her heart warm by what he had said. But then she was back to her old evil self again. "I don't think so, Tojo," she said, shaking her head and laughing. "You're the good person and I'm the bad one. That's how this friendship – I mean partnership – works."

A little smile appeared on Tojo's face. "Admit it, Tama. You think we're friends. Come on... say it."

Tama closed her eyes and sighed. "Fine, I admit it. We're friends, whatever." She opened her eyes, looking over at Tojo, who now had a wide smile on his face.

"*Best* friends," he added, pulling Tama into a tight hug. "Come here, you!"

"Hey, Tojo... get off me!" Tama choked as Tojo hugged her tightly. "I'm not... very comfortable... with this... cutesy moment!"

Tojo released her from the hug, and Tama gasped for breath frantically, her eyes wide with horror. "Don't *ever* do that to me again!" she shouted angrily, before she suddenly calmed down. "But... yeah. Okay. We're best friends."

Tojo felt a funny feeling in his stomach. *Best friends?* he thought, still smiling widely. *I must be making progress. Maybe one day she will find out she's good... with the right person to help her.*

"What are you smiling about?" Tama asked, noticing Tojo's smile. If she looked really hard then she would have noticed he was blushing.

"Oh..." Tojo laughed nervously. "It's nothing. I'm just pleased, that's all. You know, getting a best friend is one of the first steps to becoming a good person."

Tama rolled her eyes. "Tojo, why do you want me to be so good? Is there some certain, special reason why you really want me to be nice?"

"Because you *are* good, Tama," Tojo insisted, getting closer to her. "You just don't realise it. All the time you convince yourself that you're not worth anything – that you need to be in charge of everything to prove yourself. You don't need to. I mean, just look at me. I'm a good person, and I don't want to prove myself. I *know* who I am. The question is this: do *you*?"

"Okay, so now you're trying to confuse me into being good?" Tama said, raising an eyebrow. "Tojo, I want every single person in this kingdom to grovel at my paws. Does that sound like something a good person would want?"

"You don't *really* want that, Tama. It's just something you keep telling yourself so much that you actually believe it," Tojo explained. "Come on, Tama. What do you want more than anything else in the world?"

Tama narrowed her eyes, actually thinking about the question. She then stared into Tojo's bright blue eyes. "Someone who loves me," she finally answered, dead serious. Tojo could have sworn she had tears in her eyes as she said that, but maybe he was just imagining things.

Tojo sighed, looking away from her suddenly. "Oh," he said. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

Tojo stared at Tama again, staring hard into her orange eyes. "I think you know."

Tama turned away from him, holding back a sob and wiping a tear from her eye. It was rare that she ever got upset about something, but Tojo had managed it. She never revealed her secrets to anyone – and when she did she only told them to Tojo, her best – and *only* – friend.

The only thing Tama really, *really* wanted... was to feel loved. Deep down, that was all she needed. Someone who would look after her. Her parents certainly hadn't done that, because they got rid of her as fast as they possibly could. Her parents never really loved her. In that one, small moment, the good part of Tama had finally come out.

And it broke her little heart.

Simba raced towards the cave at the bottom of the gorge, knowing that he was going to win the race between him and Nala. *I'm gonna do it!* he thought excitedly. *There's no way Nala can beat me now!*

And then, Simba's chest started to ache. And before he knew it, he was coughing again, skidding to a halt just short of the cave opening. "No... No!" Simba cried through coughs, watching as Nala raced past him into the cave opening, raising her front paws in the air triumphantly as she stopped.

"Yes!" she cried victoriously. "I'm the winner! I *knew* you couldn't beat me, Simba!" Nala noticed Simba was coughing – badly – and joined him by his side. "Simba? What's up?"

"I... don't... know!" he exclaimed, continuing to cough. "It's just... this... cough. It won't... stop!"

"Well, when did it start?" Nala asked, as his coughing finally seemed to stop.

Simba, breathing heavily, shook his head. "I can't really remember. I think it was yesterday morning, not too long after that whole vampire thing with Tama. And since then it hasn't stopped. The cough just keeps getting worse, and worse, and worse! I must have swallowed something funny for dinner..."

"Do you want to go back?" Nala asked.

Simba laughed in response, before coughing again. "Ha!" he exclaimed. "Yeah, right! Come on, I want to show you this. It's really cool!" he said, before disappearing into the cave opening.

Nala walked in after him, and looked around the cave, which wasn't all that dark at all. She'd been in caves with Simba before, and most of them were a lot darker than this. *Maybe this cave was really cool after all...*

But that wasn't what Nala was focusing on right now. She was focusing on Simba – which she always did anyway, but not in the way she was right now.

It was that cough. Nala had only just noticed it right now, and she had to admit, she was a little bit concerned. Simba never – *never* – got sick. He wouldn't let himself. He had a healthy body, despite all the fruit he refused to eat. Nala thought that, since he was so energetic, he was totally impervious to illness. She didn't think it was possible for a cub like him.

Maybe I'm just being silly, Nala thought to herself as she followed Simba into the cave. *Maybe it's just a little cough that'll go away after a while*. She nodded, liking that idea. *Yeah... that sounds right to me. By tomorrow he'll be the same old Simba I know and really, really love.*

Little did Nala know, that by tomorrow he wouldn't be the same old Simba she knew and really, *really* loved.

AN: Ooh, that bit with Tama was sad, wasn't it? I'm afraid it's going to get sadder. Don't forget to tell me of your heartbreak in a review, because I do just *love* it when you readers do that. Either way I'll see you tomorrow. You know I will.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: It Hurts So Much

AN: This story is going to make *me* cry by the end. Thanks for all the reviews, by the way! Oh, you wouldn't believe the look on my face when I saw I'd had ten reviews for the first two chapters! *Ten!* Can you people be any more brilliant?

Chapter Three: It Hurts So Much

An eager grin on his face, Simba led Nala right to the end of the cave, which ended in a surprisingly well lit room. "Tada!" Simba exclaimed, turning to her. "Well, what do you think?"

Nala looked around the room, and gasped in wonder. "Oh, Simba! It's beautiful..." she said, amazed at what Simba had brought her all this way to show her.

The cave room was illuminated a bright orange, and this was because of a large hole in the ceiling, which allowed the sunlight to shine through, lighting up the room. Right underneath the hole was a large pool of water, which twinkled with beauty, thanks to the sunlight. A little waterfall to the side of the pool supplied it with an endless amount of water.

"I know, right?" said Simba, his grin widening. "I knew you'd like it!" Simba rushed over to the pool and dived right into it. "Yippee!" he exclaimed, landing in the pool with a *splash!* "Come on in!" he called, beckoning for Nala to join him. "The water's nice and warm!"

Nala's eyes widened. "Warm?" she said, surprised, before running to the edge of the pool and hopping right in. "Wow!" she exclaimed, enjoying the soothing warmth of the water. "How is the water *warm?*"

Simba raised a claw, pointing to the hole in the ceiling. "The sun. It shines right through the hole, warming all the water up. Pretty, cool, huh?"

"I love it!" Nala replied, grinning. "But... how did you even find this cave in the first place?"

"Well, I kinda snuck out in the middle of the night while you were sleeping, and found this place," he explained. "I wanted to find something really cool to surprise you with."

Nala was touched, and could feel herself blushing. "You... You did all this for me?" she said, as Simba floated past her on his back, his eyes closed, smiling.

"Yep," he replied. "I figured you deserved a cool surprise after all the trouble we've had to go through lately. It's about time we had some actual *fun* for once. Right?"

Nala grabbed Simba by surprise and planted a kiss on his muzzle. "It's a great surprise, Simba. The best surprise I've ever had." She gazed into his auburn eyes, and nuzzled him. "I love you, you know that?"

Simba blushed and nodded. "I love you, too, Nala. And we'll always be together. For ever, okay?"

Nala could feel her heart beginning to race. *Oh... you bet, Simba*, she thought. "For ever," she agreed with a giggle.

Simba swam over to the edge of the pool. "I guess it's your turn to find a surprise next time," he told her, a teasing smile on his face. "And you'll have to do something ten times better than this if you want to impress me," he said with a cough.

Nala rolled her eyes. "Ha!" she exclaimed. "If you think I'm going to find *you* a surprise then you've got another thing coming, Simba."

Simba pretended to be offended. "How dare you, Nala! How could you say such a thing to your superior Prince?"

"Since I'm the Princess, that makes us equal," Nala informed him. "You can't tell me to do anything. And actually, the lady comes first, so *you* have to do everything I tell you to!"

"Yeah, great..." Simba muttered, before coughing again. "Oh, come on!" he moaned through coughs. "Not this again!"

"What is it with that cough?" Nala asked, noticing that the cough sounded even worse this time. Every single cough just seemed that little bit worse than the last, and Nala had to admit, it concerned her. Deep down, she knew something was wrong. Was Simba getting ill? But he *never* got ill! But then again, there's a first time for everything...

"Do you think you're getting sick, Simba?" Nala asked, swimming closer to him. "I've gotta admit, that cough sounds pretty bad."

Simba coughed some more. "Aw, it's not that bad," he said, coughing harder and harder. "It's just... a little... cough. How bad can it... be?"

"It sounds *really* bad," Nala told him. "I think you're getting sick. Come on, Simba, how else do you feel? It can't just be that cough."

Simba grinned innocently. "Nothing..." he said, coughing again. "Nothing at all. It's just the... cough."

Simba knew he was lying that time. He wouldn't admit it to Nala, but he was scared. It wasn't just the cough, like he had told her. It was a lot more than that.

It started with the cough, yes, but then other things started happening. As Simba continued to cough, his chest began to hurt more and more. First it was just an itch, then an ache, but now it was throbbing with pain. The pain just made him want to cough more and more. He didn't think the coughing would ever stop. The more he coughed, the more it hurt. But he *couldn't* stop. He couldn't help himself.

Then there was the pain in his throat, making it difficult to breathe. Simba had a strong voice, so he knew how to hide that, but it was still pretty difficult. Again, the more he coughed, the more the pain in his throat seemed to worsen. He'd probably day from lack of air before he coughed his lungs out.

It didn't stop with the throat pain, though. There was the headache – and that really, *really* hurt. It only started half an hour ago, but it just wouldn't end. It got worse, and worse, and worse. Simba felt like screaming and crying out, but he didn't... for Nala's sake.

He didn't want her to worry. He didn't want her to be scared that something bad was happening. It was *his* job to worry. He was the one who had to worry about the people who were trying to kill them and how they were going to save the day yet again. Nala didn't deserve to worry, because she'd had a tough time herself, very early on in her life. Her father had been killed – by Hago, to make things worse – and even though she never actually *knew* her father, Simba could still see that she wondered sometimes. She wanted to know more. Simba couldn't really blame her.

So he wouldn't tell her. He couldn't. Otherwise, Nala would start to worry, and he *really* didn't want that.

Simba gasped suddenly, startling Nala. His heart was starting to ache. His own heart. Simba coughed hard – harder than ever before – and his heart started to throb with pain. Simba felt like he was going to burst out crying. Why did everything have to hurt so, so much?

But the worst part was that Simba knew Nala was going to find out very, very soon...

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Illness Strikes

Chapter Four: Illness Strikes

"Oh..." Simba moaned, slowly making his way up Pride Rock, feeling nothing but the agonising pain that plagued his body. He was ill. *Really* ill, and he knew that. There was something seriously wrong with him, and he couldn't hide it any longer. He couldn't hide it from anyone. Not from his mother, his father, Nala...

Nala walked alongside him, eyeing him with concern. There was a mixture of worry and dread churning in her stomach, because Simba didn't just look ill. He looked like he was *dying*. He literally looked like he was... dying right in front of her. She thought that Simba was dead once before, and she didn't want to think that again. But now, it looked like she didn't have to think about it at all... because it was actually happening.

"Simba," Nala spoke, daring to ask about whatever was wrong with him. "You're sick, aren't you? *Really* sick."

Simba stared into Nala's teal eyes, and nodded, before coughing again. "Yeah," he rasped, finding it hard to speak with the choking pain in his throat. He could barely breathe... What was wrong with him? "But I don't know what's..." He coughed and spluttered fiercely, his chest burning with the worst kind of pain imaginable. "I can't figure out what's wrong with me."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Nala asked, seriously concerned for his wellbeing. "We could have gotten you help."

"Doesn't feel like anyone can help with this," he remarked, laughing for a second, before coughing again. "It feels like... I'm gonna..."

Simba's eyes rolled into the back of his head, and he collapsed to the ground, unconscious. Nala gasped.

"Simba!"

He was so brave. I don't know how he did it. To hold in all of that pain just to stop me from worrying made me feel so... touched, in a way I didn't really even understand. Even when he was dying, Simba made me feel the special one. He cared about me so much to the extent that he didn't even care about himself. He really did love me... but it's too late for that now. Simba's dead, and there's no way anyone is going to change that. I'm standing on the edge of Pride Rock, all alone, with nobody to bring Simba back. He's gone for ever.

"Ow..." Simba moaned, his eyes flickering open, looked up at Nala's beautiful face, which appeared to be some kind of the blur, thanks to his hazy sight. "It's an angel..." he muttered, a goofy smile on his face.

Nala couldn't help but laugh in response. Simba's sight slowly returned to normal, and Simba could see three people standing over him – Nala, his mother, Sarabi, and his father, King Mufasa himself. His parents were giving him reassuring smiles, but he could see that underneath the smile they were hiding something truly terrible.

"How are you feeling, son?" Mufasa asked, still using that reassuring smile. Simba knew his father – he *never* smiled like that... What were they hiding from him that he didn't know about?

Simba tried to move, but he couldn't. He felt so weak, and his body just seemed to burn with pain. "Still sick," he replied, his throat feeling very choked up. He wasn't coughing anymore, but Simba didn't exactly think that was something to be *pleased* about.

Sarabi blinked back tears, trying desperately to block out what was happening to her son. It was so horrible... so horrible that she didn't even believe it herself. Why did this have to happen to her son? Her Simba? It wasn't fair...

Simba breathed heavily, looking to his father for guidance. Surely he knew what was wrong, right? "Dad... what's wrong with me? Why am I sick?"

Mufasa gave his mate a sad look – the saddest Simba had ever seen his father – and then looked down at him, giving Simba the same saddened expression. He looked heartbroken. "Simba..." he began, taking a deep breath. "I'm afraid we have some very bad news."

Simba couldn't describe how he felt when his father told him that. His stomach twisted in such a way that he felt he could have died there and then, and it wouldn't have made much difference at all. "What is it?" Simba croaked, tears welling up in his eyes, as if he knew what was coming...

"You're ill, Simba," Mufasa told him, his frown widening. "Very ill. I had a very wise, old friend of mine examine you, and he told me you've contracted an illness known as Kulaani. It's..." Simba could have sworn he saw his own father tremble with fear. "It's fatal, son. There's no cure. We can't..." Mufasa blinked back tears. "We can't do anything."

Sarabi quickly turned away from her son, quietly sobbing as tears streamed down her face. Mufasa didn't do anything as tears began to fall from his own eyes. Nala just stared at Simba, unable to move or do anything at all. She couldn't even cry. She couldn't even shed one tear, because... it was just so sad that crying wouldn't do a single thing.

Simba was dying, and there was nothing anybody could do about it.

I couldn't believe it. An illness, just like that. Nobody had any idea where it had come from, or how Simba had got it. And the worst part was that there was nothing to be done about it. Simba didn't have very long to live. The illness – Kulaani – killed someone in a matter of days. You'd just get progressively weaker until... you went to sleep and you didn't wake up. Ever. No one knew a cure. A cure had never been found, because the illness itself was extremely rare in the first place – meaning a cure would be much rarer. So I had to sit and watch as the cub who my heart belonged to lost his own.

Mufasa and Sarabi left to consult their 'very wise friend', leaving Nala all on her own with Simba. She didn't know what to say to him. Everything just felt so... hollow and empty to her now.

"Nala," Simba spoke, looking up at her, his eyes half closed, because he was so weak that he couldn't open them fully.

"You shouldn't speak, Simba," Nala muttered quietly in response. "Save your breath."

Simba chuckled, and for once it didn't hurt. "You think I'm gonna die in a few days and I'm not going to spend them talking to you?" He scoffed. "Yeah, right, Nala. Good one."

Nala laughed, closing her eyes as tears began to stream down her face. "I don't even know what to say," she admitted, still smiling. "It's so... weird. It doesn't feel real to me. It feels like a dream. I just feel like closing my eyes and waking up, so you can show me the next 'really cool place' in the Pride Lands." She sobbed. "I wouldn't even care if it was a cave filled with rotting skulls. At least you wouldn't be..." Nala couldn't hold it back any longer, and started to sob and cry her heart out, leaning her head gently on Simba's chest.

Simba smiled awkwardly, putting a paw on Nala's shoulder. He didn't care if he was dying or not. He had to be strong.

For her.

AN: Oh, this is so sad! Does anyone have a tissue? But, sniffles aside, the next two tear-jerking chapters will be up tomorrow. I'm hoping for more reviews, because I just *love* it when people tell me how depressed they are. Only kidding! But whatever you do, come back tomorrow. It'll be a laugh! And a cry...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: A Dying Wish

AN: Whoa, there are a lot of theories out there on this one about whether Simba will die or not. This is apparently much sadder than I thought it was. Whoops.

This was supposed to be a relatively light-hearted series, but I've overstepped the mark, haven't I? Well, I couldn't resist writing this story. It was supposed to go a lot differently, but then the terminal illness idea popped into my mind and, hey presto, that's what you're reading right now. But hey, it could have been a lot worse – and believe me, I *can* come up with a lot worse. But with *this* series, it's not exactly my intention. I suggest you go find my *other* series for that, but whatever. Just to warn you in advance. Anyway, here's the next two chapters.

Chapter Five: A Dying Wish

Nala didn't know how long she'd sat with Simba for, and, to be honest, she didn't really care. If he was dying, then she wasn't going to move. She had to hang on to every moment like it was her last with him – and pretty soon it would be. She couldn't leave him. Not now.

She heard a cough. "Nala... how long have you been here for?" Simba asked, before coughing again.

"Hours," she replied, looking down at him and smiling. "... I don't want to leave you. Not like this."

Simba groaned. "Oh, this hurts. I'm not gonna lie to you. Even though I... kinda did for a little while. But I need to ask you this." Nala could hear nothing but Simba's heavy breathing, as she leaned in close to see what he had to say. "Do you..." Simba winced, not really wanting to think about this. "Do you really think I'll die? I mean, *really*?"

A sad look crossed Nala's face. She wanted to say, "No, Simba, you'll be just fine and this will all clear up in a day or two." But she couldn't. Even though she would have really liked to, she couldn't lie to him. Not when he was in this state. "Simba..." She hesitated. Oh, she really didn't want to answer this... "Your parents said there... They said there wasn't anything they could do about it. You can't..." Nala felt the tears welling up in her eyes again. "You can't cure this... Kulaani illness."

Simba held back some coughs, a rather determined look on his face. "Then you..." Simba grunted in pain. It was so agonising he couldn't stand it. "You need to find out something for me," he told her, before almost slipping out of consciousness. Gritting his teeth, he fought to stay awake, but the illness was fighting back fiercely to send him to his sleep. "I want you to find out what it... means. Kulaani – what does it mean?"

"Why do you want to know?" Nala replied, eyeing him with confusion. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"I want to know," Simba replied, opening his eyes all the way, even though that just made his whole body hurt even more. But it was the only way he was going to stay awake. "I want to know how... it kills you," he finished, gasping for breath. "It hurts so much, Nala..."

"How it kills you...?" Nala said quietly. "Just how am I supposed to find that out? Who am I gonna ask?"

"Anyone," Simba replied, his head lowering to the ground. "Someone will know. I need to find out before... Well, you know," he said, before closing his eyes, unconscious again. It was getting worse, and Nala most definitely knew that he didn't have much longer left to live.

Nala stared at Simba, who she knew was fighting desperately to stop that illness, no matter how much it was hurting him. Even in his sleep he'd be fighting, never stopping, never giving up, just to alleviate the pain.

I can't leave him, Nala told herself, deliberating on whether to find an answer to the question Simba had asked her. What if I leave and he dies? Just like that? I could take one step out of the den and he'd stop breathing instantly. Anything could happen if I leave. Anything.

Nala turned away from Simba's unconscious body, nibbling on one of her claws in thought. *But he asked me. It's the one thing he wants to know before he leaves me for ever. It's only one simple question. It can't take too long to find out, can it?* Nala sighed. *But where do I even start? This illness is so rare that even the adults don't know about it! But I can't let Simba down. I won't let Simba down.*

Nala turned back to Simba, and gave him a little kiss on the cheek, before walking out of the den, a determined look on her face. She was going to find out what Kulaani meant, and then she was going to make sure that Simba knew before he died. She owed him that much, after everything he'd done for her.

I was so stupid not to even think about who would have known what Kulaani meant. It was the most obvious person in the world that I could have asked. But when the person who you love with all your heart is dying, your mind doesn't exactly work at its best.

It didn't take me too long to think about her. It had to be her. The only problem was this: where would I find her? She was practically the most reclusive cub in the Pride Lands! I'd only seen her sleeping in the den most nights with that friend of hers, but during the day she was really mysterious. How would I find her? Out of the whole of the majestic kingdom of the Pride Lands, which was filled with all that room, that space! It seemed like infinity! To find that one person in a million! It would be the toughest thing I'd ever have to search for!

"Tama? Oh, she's always close to the Outlands. You wouldn't find her anywhere else," Sarafina told Nala. The first person she thought to ask was her mother, and to her surprise, she knew the answer.

Nala nodded and smiled, before rushing off. "Thanks, Mom!" she said, before hurrying down Pride Rock.

"No problem," Sarafina muttered quietly. "Just come back soon... I don't think Simba is going to last much longer." She shot a worried look back at the den opening, and decided that she'd have to pay her own visit to Simba very soon...

"Tama, what are you doing?" Tojo asked, noticing that Tama had been surprisingly quiet during the past few hours. She had done nothing but stare at a dying tree, deep in thought. The Outlands weren't exactly picturesque, so he knew that she wasn't admiring how beautiful the tree was.

"Thinking," she muttered in response, saying no more than that.

"Well, I kinda figured that," he told her, frowning as he walked over to her. "What's on your mind, hmm? Looks like something important."

Tama smiled a little and chuckled. "You could say that," she replied, turning to look at him. "I've just been thinking about... me."

Tojo raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you always?" he remarked, smiling at her now.

"Not in the way you're thinking, Tojo," said Tama. "I don't *always* think about evil schemes and takeover plots, you know. I'm thinking about personal things."

"Like...?" Tojo asked, motioning for her to continue.

Tama sighed. *Should I really tell him?* she asked herself. *Oh, I might as well,* she concluded, shrugging. *Who else is he going to tell, huh? It's not like he's got any other friends.*

"Tojo, I've been thinking about—"

"Tama!" a voice called, interrupted Tama mid-sentence.

A wide frown spread across Tama's face. She didn't even have to look to know who it was. "I know who's voice that is, and I get the feeling that the next few minutes aren't going to be very pleasant."

Tojo noticed Tama's claws were unsheathing, as he turned to see who was calling for her. He could see Nala rushing towards them, an urgent look on her face. Tojo could tell she'd been crying, because her eyes were very puffy and red. *She looks so sad,* Tojo thought to himself, suddenly feeling sad himself, although he didn't know why. "Tama, please don't do anything rash," he warned her. "She looks pretty upset."

Tama shrugged. "She's my greatest enemy, Tojo. I've got every right to slash her in the throat as soon as she gets here." Tojo noticed Tama's claws were retracting. "But I suppose I might as well let her say what she needs to."

Nala skidded to a halt in front of them, panting heavily. "Oh, I've found you!" she cried, relieved. "I've found you!"

"Well done," Tama remarked, narrowing her eyes. "What do you want for that, an extra antelope for dinner or something?"

"You're not very polite when speaking to other people, are you?" Tojo remarked, shooting Tama a look.

"I do my best." Tama turned to Nala, the look in her eyes showing that she obviously didn't want Nala to be there. "Now, come on, come on, I haven't got all day. What do you want to tell me?"

"I... wanted... to ask you... if you knew anything about... something called... the Kulaani illness?" Nala asked, feeling exhausted. She wanted to get this done as quick as she possible so she could return to Simba before his condition worsened – and right now, it probably had.

Tama raised her eyebrows. "The Kulaani illness?" she exclaimed. "Funny, that was always one of my parents' favourite illnesses..."

"So tell me what it means!" Nala said quickly.

A cruel smile spread across Tama's face. "Now what makes you think I'm going to do that?"

***Chapter 6*: Chapter 6: Last Goodbyes**

Chapter Six: Last Goodbyes

Nala's face fell in absolute horror at what Tama had said to her. How could Tama be so horrible to her at a time like this? "I... I don't understand," Nala finally said, her eyes widened at Tama.

"Why should I tell you?" Tama said, shrugging. "Why is the Kulaani illness so important to you, Nala?"

"Because Simba is dying!" Nala shouted angrily. "And the last thing he wants to know before he dies is what Kulaani means!"

For a second, Tama looked shocked. But it was only a second. From then on, Tama just stared at her blankly. "And that's my problem? Why don't you ask someone else, Nala? Someone who actually cares."

"Tama, I thought you loved Simba?" Tojo said, confused.

"Yeah, that was then, and this is now," Tama told him. "I don't even care anymore. I've realised it's pointless. There's no way I'm ever going to make Simba my boyfriend, so what's the point in even trying?"

"He's dying!" Nala cried, tears welling up in her eyes. "He's going to die and you won't even tell me the one thing he wants to know! Can you really be that heartless?"

Tama smiled in response, and nodded. "Yeah. I think I can. It's all I'm good at, Nala. I realise that now. I had a good long, hard think about the person I am, and I realise it all now. I was born to be a bad person, and that's how I'm gonna stay. If Simba's dying, then I couldn't care less, because to be honest, he is irrelevant to me now. I've got better things to do with my life than chase him around all the time."

"It means 'curse'," Tojo informed her, not daring to look at Tama's reaction to this. "That's what it means, Nala. 'Curse'."

"How do you know?" Tama snarled.

"My pride wasn't exactly the best in the world, Tama. It wasn't really the biggest either – but there was a lot of disease and illness. One that a lot of people talked about – but never actually got – was the Kulaani illness."

"What is it?" Nala asked, getting closer to Tojo. "What does it do to you?"

"It's a blood infection," he explained. "It's when you get bitten by someone, and their blood gets into you. Not just any normal blood, though – a certain type of blood that's very, very rare. A blood type that only exists through means of a mythical curse. Once you get it, it just... shuts your whole body down until you go to sleep and... you don't wake up. That's it, you're dead."

Nala thought her next question was a long shot, but she might as well try it. "Is there... a cure, or something?"

Tama chuckled. "Yeah, right."

Tojo shot Tama an annoyed look, before speaking to Nala. "The only cure I know of is in a story. Something called the 'Kiss of Life'. According to the story, if the person who bit the victim kisses the victim, they become cured. Of course, that's... only a legend." Tojo gave her an awkward smile. "I'm not sure if it'd actually work." He sighed. "I'm sorry, Nala."

"That's horrible..." Nala said quietly, looking down at the ground sadly. Simba was going to suffer a painful death, unless of course the person who infected Simba just happened to walk along and decided to kiss him. "Thank you, though. For telling me, I mean."

Tojo gave Tama a look, like he wanted to tell her something, but he knew he couldn't, because she would kill him if he did.

"I guess you'll be going now," Tama said to Nala, turning around and walking away. "I am a very busy cub, and I really haven't got all day, so if you don't mind..."

Nala glared at Tama. She wanted to pounce on her there and then, but she knew it wasn't worth it. Nothing was worth it right now. The only thing that was on her mind right now was returning to Simba and telling him what he wanted to know.

"I... I'd better be going," Nala said hurriedly, turning around and heading away. "Thanks again."

Nala bounded off into the distance, her head hanging low in sadness. She knew Simba was going to die, but she felt relieved that she could fulfil his dying wish. She hadn't failed.

All she had to do now was tell Simba, and then wait until he died.

"Tama, why did you act like that?" Tojo shouted angrily, jumping in front of her and preventing her from walking any further. "You knew what was going on, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she replied, pushing past him.

Tojo pursued her. "Tama, I think you *do* know what I'm talking about. Think about it – the other day you bit Simba, and now all of a sudden he's come down with the Kulaani illness. That's not just a coincidence, is it? Is it?"

"I didn't even have the curse when I bit Simba!" Tama snapped. "The sunlight hit me, remember? You *told* me that's what happened!"

"It happened *while* you were biting him, Tama!" Tojo told her exasperatedly. "Some of the infected blood must have gotten into his wound while you were biting him."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Tama shouted. "How does that explain how everyone else in the kingdom is fine?"

"Because you didn't finish," Tojo replied. "You didn't complete the transformation. Everyone else could handle the infected blood just fine because you turned them into vampires, too! Simba can't handle it because he's *not* one!" Tojo stared at Tama, and then nodded. "But you knew that, didn't you? You knew it as soon as Nala mentioned the Kulaani illness! Didn't you?"

Tama stopped walking, and stared into Tojo's eyes. "So what if I did?" she finally said.

An angry look appeared on Tojo's face. "You're not serious, are you?" he said, sounding rather disgusted. "Simba's dying, and now all of a sudden you don't want to save him, when you *can*?"

"No, I don't!" Tama snapped. "Don't you get it, Tojo? I *don't*. I told you – Simba doesn't matter anymore. Like I said – I had a long think earlier and I decided that I shouldn't even bother with him anymore! I should focus on more important things!"

"But he'll *die*, Tama," Tojo reminded her. "Could you really do that? Could you really let someone die when you know very well that you can save them!"

Tama grinned, and nodded. "Yes," she said coldly. "Because all my life, no one has ever cared about me! No one has ever cared about *me*! So why should I care about anyone else, huh? Why should I save Simba so he can have his happy ending with Nala? Why should I do that? That's the point, Tojo. *I'm not going to! Simba's going to die a painful death and Nala's going to live out the rest of her miserable existence with a broken heart! And for once I'll actually have something that I wanted! Everyone will be miserable, and that's just how I like it!*" Tama screamed, her whole body coursing with nothing but rage and anger. "I've never had... anything. *Anything!* Everyone else gets what they want except me! And I'm not letting it go that way anymore! *I'm not!*"

Tojo just stared at her. "You're... You're a monster," he said, absolutely disgusted with her. "Out of all the bad people I've met, you're the worst of them all. You think nobody cares about you? I think sometimes you should take a look at the people right in front of you, Tama! Because then maybe you'll find that there's some person out there who actually *does* care about you! You were right, Tama – you aren't a good person. You're a bad person, through and through."

Tama glared at Tojo. "*Good!*" she spat, before storming off, leaving her only friend all on his own.

The next time Simba opened his eyes, he found his mother staring down at him, a saddened expression on his face. He couldn't really blame her, what with him dying and all.

"Mom..." Simba croaked, smiling at her.

Sarabi smiled back. "Simba, you really shouldn't be talking," she told him, although she was really pleased to hear his voice. "You need to save your strength."

"I'm gonna die anyway. What's the point?" he retorted, suppressing the urge to cough.

"I'd like to say that's not true," said Sarabi, sighing sadly. "But I just can't. I'm sorry, Simba. I would give my life for you, if I could. If there was any way I could cure your illness then I would do it. Even if it was to suffer the most painful death in the world, I wouldn't care. I'd be happy, because I would know that you were safe."

Simba smiled. "Thanks, Mom." He coughed. "But it doesn't look like we can do anything, huh?"

"That's what annoys me the most," Sarabi admitted. "The fact that I can't help, no matter what I try. This illness is so mysterious. I wouldn't even know where you got it from in the first place. The Pride Lands hardly have any disease or illness. This shouldn't have happened to you. You don't deserve this." Sarabi blinked back tears. "You've done a lot for your age, Simba. More than I've ever done."

"Don't say that, Mom."

"But it's true. You're a hero, Simba. Why should such a... good person like you come down with such an awful illness like this? It's not right." Sarabi frowned, as her tears silently spilled onto the ground.

Simba coughed again. "What happens, Mom? What happens when I... go?"

Sarabi sighed. "I don't know, Simba. I don't know what I'll do, or how I'll cope. I just know that I'll have to keep going, because I'd be ashamed of myself if I gave up on life. I wouldn't be worthy to join the Great Kings of the Past." Sarabi looked towards the den opening, and then back at Simba. "Where's Nala?"

"I don't know," Simba lied. "I went to sleep, and when I woke up she wasn't there."

"Poor thing," Sarabi muttered, as her frown seemed to widen. "I don't know how Nala will cope, either. That's the thing when somebody dies – you don't know how to carry on afterwards without them there." Taking a deep breath, Sarabi got up, and smoothed the top of her son's head. "I'll be back soon, Simba. I have to go and speak with your father. Just... try to stay strong."

Simba nodded. "Okay, Mom. I'll try."

Sarabi smiled and walked away, suppressing the urge to cry her heart out. *What am I going to do?* she moaned, feeling like her world had been torn apart.

"Simba?" a voice spoke, causing Simba to open his eyes. To his surprise, he found Nala's mother, Sarafina, looking down on him.

"Oh... hi," Simba said, not expecting this. "Um... what are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to check in on you," she replied. "After all, I am your girlfriend's mother. It's about time we had a private talk, right?"

Simba chuckled and nodded. "Yeah. I guess." Simba coughed, his lungs burning with agonising pain. He didn't think he had very long left... "Have you seen Nala around anywhere?"

"About an hour ago, yes," Sarafina replied, nodding. "She was looking for a cub called Tama. I don't know *why* she was looking for her, though. Do you know?"

Simba shook his head in response, although he had an idea as to why she had gone to Tama. She'd probably gone there to ask about the Kulaani illness. He wanted to know what it was before he died, although he had a theory about it already...

"She thinks the world of you, you know," Sarafina told him. "I haven't seen anyone who's managed to make Nala as happy as you have. Not even me," she said with a chuckle. "She really does love you. I just don't know how she's going to carry on without you. I really don't. I don't want you to die, Simba. I know that if you do, then Nala will cry herself to sleep every night for the rest of her life. She'll live her life with a broken heart, because you mean so much to her."

"But... your mate died, didn't he?" Simba asked, cocking his head to the side, curious.

Sarafina nodded, sad memories returning to her. "Yes, he did. And that's why I came here, because I knew that if I stayed in my old pride then I would have killed myself. Coming here has changed me, Simba. Also, if it wasn't for you, then I would never have discovered who killed my mate. And if it wasn't for you, then he'd still be alive. For that, I thank you."

"No problem," Simba said, before delving into a coughing fit again.

"I'm proud of you, Simba," Sarafina told him. "I'm as proud of you as I am of Nala. I want you to know that before you die. Remember that."

Simba stopped coughing after a considerable amount of effort, and nodded.

Sarafina gave him a little smile and walked out of the den, never looking back, because she knew that if she did then she wouldn't be able to stop crying.

AN: And everything is bleak and horrible. Well, folks, let's have a party! That'll brighten your moods, won't it? No? Oh, fine then, I'll have the party all by myself. I'll post the last chapter tomorrow, after my very lonely party. Bye for now!

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Eternal Sleep

AN: It's the climax I'm sure you've all been waiting for. Will Simba live, or will he die?

Chapter Seven: Eternal Sleep

Nala sprinted into the den and practically dived to Simba's side, desperate to reach him in time, so she could tell him what he wanted to know before he died. After all the brave things he'd done for Nala, she thought it was only fair that she returned the favour – even if it was just once.

"Simba!" Nala cried, looking down at his motionless body. "Oh, please don't be dead! I found out what Kulaani means!"

Simba let out a little groan in response, telling Nala that he was still alive. "You did?" he said quietly in a pleased tone, causing Nala to smile in response. "Well..." Simba slowly rolled over, so he was staring into her eyes. "What does it mean? What does it... do to you?"

"It means 'curse'," Nala began solemnly. "It's a blood infection. You get it when someone with a certain curse bites you. It makes you really sick, and it just slowly kills you until you fall asleep and you don't wake up. It's horrible. Really, *really* horrible." Nala let out a sob. "And the worst thing is that you've got it."

Nala hugged him gently, never really wanting to let go. She wanted to keep hold of Simba until she herself died, too.

Using what little strength he had, Simba hugged her back. "It's okay, Nala. It'll be okay."

"No, it won't," Nala sniffled, staring into his auburn eyes. "It really won't, Simba. What am I gonna do without you? What will *any* of us do without you? I wouldn't even want to live anymore... not without you."

"Don't say things like that, Nala," Simba told her. "I'm gonna miss you, too... but we'll be together again... someday. I promise you."

Nala let out another sob, as tears streamed from her eyes. She then smiled. "I always thought... I always thought I was gonna marry you."

For the first time since his illness, Simba felt his heart warm, and he smiled widely. "We could do it now, if you want," he said with a chuckle.

Nala giggled, more tears falling from her eyes. "R-really?" she stammered, thinking this was just one of Simba's jokes. "Y-you don't actually mean that, d-do you?"

Simba nodded, and shrugged. "Why not? I've only got... a few hours left, so I might as well do the stuff I was going to do with I got older. So, that why I'm gonna ask you... Nala, will you marry me?"

"Of course I will, silly. It was my idea in the first place!" Nala answered, unable to stop a happy grin from spreading across her face.

"Okay, then," said Simba, clearing his throat. "Nala, do you promise to love me, blah, blah, blah, until we both die?"

"What do you think? I do!" Nala declared. "So Simba, do *you* promise to love me, blah, blah, blah, until we both die?"

Simba grinned. "I do. And even *after* I die."

"Then you may now kiss the lioness," Nala said, before their muzzles met for a kiss.

From that moment on, even though it wasn't exactly an official ceremony, she knew that Simba was going to be forever her mate.

Tama couldn't help it. She cried, and she cried hard, more upset than she ever had been before. She was angry with the world, for everything it had done to her. The world was cruel. The world was wicked. She couldn't trust anyone. Everyone and everything had tried to hurt her so many times, and in most cases, had succeeded.

It's not fair, she thought as she cried, burying her face into the ground. *Everyone else is happy. Everyone else gets what they want. Everyone else has someone who loves them. But me? I get nothing. Nothing. I've been beaten to an inch of my life, my parents abandoned me, and I've lost the only friend I've ever had.*

The only person she wanted to see right now was Tojo. She didn't mean to yell at him like that, but after thinking about her life for so long, she couldn't help but feel angry. Her life had been so unfair – she never had the chance to be the person who she really wanted to be.

She wouldn't see him now. Here she was, alone, in the middle of the Outlands, surrounded by dying trees and plants.

Good, Tama thought with disgust. Just what's so good about it? I tried – I actually tried – to be a good person, and I paid the price for it. Tojo thinks I'm a good person... but why? What does he see that I don't? Is there something I'm missing? I'll never know now... because he's not here. I've lost my only friend in the world – my best friend – and he probably hates me right now. I can't really blame him.

Tama laughed. "How can anyone like me?" she asked aloud, her eyes red and her face stained with tears.

"I like you," replied a voice that Tama had desperately wanted to hear for the past hour.

Tama slowly turned her head, to see the one person that she thought she would never see again.

Tojo.

Tama slowly walked towards Tojo, as if she was assessing whether or not it was really him. "Tojo?" she said in disbelief. "Is that you?"

Tojo smiled. "Of course it's me. Who else were you expecting?"

Suppressing the urge to smile, Tama stood right in front of him, and stared into his eyes. "I'm..." Her voice got caught in her throat. She couldn't say it, no matter how much she wanted to. "I'm—"

"I forgive you," Tojo told her. Tama didn't need to say anything else to him. He knew what she meant, and that was good enough for him. He could tell, just by the look in her eyes, that she was sorry.

Tama winced, not wanting to cry. But she couldn't help it. She enveloped Tojo in a tight hug and bawled her eyes out, so much that it hurt.

Tojo hugged her back. "It's okay, Tama," he assured her soothingly. "It's okay."

Tama sobbed and cried, as she buried her head in Tojo's fur. Just having him there made things so much better. She couldn't really explain it, but Tojo seemed to do something to her that made her feel that little bit... good. When he was around, she sometimes thought she *could* be a good person. But it was so hard... How could you be good, if no one was good to you back?

But maybe... she could *try* to be good, at least once. Even if it was just to do one good thing, then she would have accomplished something worthwhile in her life.

Tama opened her eyes, and looked at Tojo, tears still leaking from her face. "What do I do?" she asked.

Tojo knew what she was talking about. "What you know is the right thing," he replied.

And he said no more than that.

People had come and gone to say their final goodbyes to Simba, but Nala was the only one who had stayed the whole evening.

It was night now, and crickets could be heard chirping across the Pride Lands, providing the only sound in the den. Other than that, everything else was silent. It was just her and Simba. She just watched him, waiting to see if he said something – waiting to see if he would tell her when he knew he was going to die.

Nala had pretty much made her mind up. She didn't want to see Simba die. She knew that. She just... wouldn't be able to survive it. Seeing him dying right in front of her wouldn't just break her heart. It would *destroy* her heart. Nala would become nothing more than an empty shell, wandering through life with no purpose. The only blessed release would be for her to die herself.

She wouldn't watch it, she had decided. When Simba was close to death – *really* close to death – Nala was going to walk away. She couldn't face seeing the most important person in her life leave her. She'd prefer to just hear about it, rather than see it.

"Simba?" Nala spoke softly, checking whether he was awake or not. "You still up?"

Simba nodded. "Yeah. I'm still up. I've just been... thinking."

"Thinking about what?" Nala asked.

"About when it's gonna happen," Simba asked. Nala knew what he meant. "When I... die."

"Well, how do you feel?"

Simba coughed. "Bad. Really bad. Everything hurts, and I feel like I haven't eaten for a month. I've never felt so weak. I don't think... I don't think I have long left, Nala. I feel like... I want to go to sleep. Every part of me just wants to close my eyes and... never wake up again. I can... I can feel my eyes closing right now."

"Oh, please don't, Simba," Nala pleaded, tears in her eyes. "You need to stay awake. I don't want you to go!" she sobbed.

"I... I don't think I can, Nala," Simba told her, his eyes half-closed. "I'm sorry. I think this is it. J-just before I go, though, I wanted to say I... I... I..."

Simba closed his eyes for the final time, and sank into a deep sleep. Her eyes wide with sadness, Nala prodded him. "Simba? What did you want to say to me? Simba?" Trembling, Nala realised that Simba wasn't going to wake up ever again. This was it. It was the final stage of the Kulaani illness – he had gone to sleep, and he would soon die.

Breathing heavily, Nala turned away and headed out of the den, not wanting to witness any more. She'd seen enough. Simba was dying, and she knew there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Nala looked at Pride Rock, and thought that's where she might as well position herself. She wanted to stay as close as she possibly could to Simba, without seeing or hearing the horrible things that were happening to him.

Lying on her stomach, Nala looked out over the beautiful scenery of the Pride Lands, and began to think about how everything in her life had gone so wrong.

When I met Simba, I thought everything would be okay. I thought it would be all right in the end. I'd settle down with the best mate in the world, have a cub, and live out the rest of my happy life in peace. That's what I thought. But then Simba started coughing. Then came the illness. And that's when it all ended.

This is the story of how Simba died.

"Where are you going?" Tojo asked, as Tama walked away from him. "Tama, where are you going?"

"I'm doing what you said," Tama replied, not looking back. "I'm doing what I know is right."

It only took Tojo a few seconds to figure out what she meant, and when he did, he smiled. "I hope so, Tama," he said quietly. "I sure hope so..."

It's happened. I know it has. Simba is gone. As soon as he closed his eyes, I knew that was the last time I would stare into them, or stroke his cute little tuft, or have a crazy adventure with him. All the things he'd done, and it was an illness that killed him in the end.

So that's how he died. That's how my Simba, the greatest cub in the world, lost his life, to the most unfair illness that someone could ever catch.

His story has ended, but it will live on for ever.

Tama could make out the shape of a person sitting on the edge of Pride Rock, staring out at the wonderful scenery of the Pride Lands.

She was careful to sneak past the person so she wouldn't be seen. She didn't want anyone to witness this. She was doing one good thing, and she didn't want anyone to know about it. No one could know. No one could know that on the inside, Tama truly was a good person.

Tama slowly walked into the den, knowing what she had to do. She could see him, lying there on the ground, his body nearly limp.

Simba had mere seconds left. Tama could tell just by looking at the poor cub. He looked like he was suffering so much pain. Unlike other people, Tama actually *could* imagine the agony he was going through. Tama had suffered a lot herself, and for once she truly believed that she had something in common with Simba.

Tama stood over Simba, and could hear that he was barely breathing. It sounded like the quietest whisper in the world. She concluded that Simba had maybe a minute or two left to live – maybe even less than that.

Tama grabbed hold of one of Simba's paws, and held it gently, just sitting with him there in silence. No one had come to witness his death. Except her, that is.

I could let him die, Tama thought to herself. *I could just walk out right now like I was never here, and he'd die. Even though I could have saved him...*

Tama stared at Simba's face, and realised the pain he was in. Horrible, awful pain. Pain on a level which maybe even *she* didn't understand. In that moment, she knew that she couldn't let Simba succumb to this ugly fate. Even though he didn't really matter to her anymore, she knew that he didn't deserve this. No one like him deserved such a horrible death.

Simba stopped breathing, and Tama gave him a sympathetic look, before planting a quick kiss on his muzzle. She then got to her paws, turned around, and walked out of the den silently, not even looking back.

She'd done her part.

Nala closed her eyes, expecting someone to come out of the den any second now to tell her that Simba had died. That he had experienced the most painful death anyone could ever have – even though there wasn't one single reason that he deserved it.

That was when she heard the gasp.

It wasn't just any normal gasp. This was a loud gasp – one of pain. Someone was in a very serious amount of pain, and Nala couldn't help but wonder who it was.

Opening her eyes and turning around, Nala realised that the gasp had come from the den. She then heard someone crying out in pain, and her mouth dropped open when she realised who it was.

"Simba!" Nala cried, rushing down Pride Rock and towards the den opening. *He's dying*, Nala thought worriedly. *Something's gone wrong and now he's not even going to die in his sleep!*

Nala found Mufasa and Sarabi hunched over Simba, confused expressions on their faces.

"What's going on?" Nala asked, her heart pounding in her chest. "What's happening to Simba?"

"I... don't know," Sarabi answered honestly, her eyes wide at what was happening to her son.

Simba's eyes were wide open, but he was screaming and crying out in pain, writhing about in agony. "Oh... it hurts!" he screamed, his body burning with the worst kind of pain imaginable.

Nala got closer to him, and spoke softly. "Simba... what's happening? Are you... Are you dying?"

"No!" Simba answered, gritting his teeth and trying to ignore the immense pain. "I'm not dying! It just... won't stop hurting!"

"He's not dying," said Mufasa, shocked.

"He's not dying," said Sarabi, frowning.

"He's not dying," said Nala, grinning.

Simba's body tensed up, trying to alleviate the pain, but nothing seemed to be working. It wouldn't stop. How long was this going to go on for? Why wasn't he dead? He *should* have been dead by now, but he wasn't. What was going on?

Breathing heavily, Simba seemed to regain control of his body, as some of the pain seemed to go away, allowing him to lie down without twitching and wriggling all over the place. He felt like it was a few hours ago, when he was just lying there, waiting to die. But strangely, things seemed to have gotten... better.

Simba took deep breaths in and out, trying to calm himself down. "What's going on?" he gasped, pain attacking his

whole body. "What's happening to me?"

"You're not dying," said Nala, still unable to believe it. She didn't care how much pain he was in – he was still alive! Alive! It felt so horrible to watch him like this... but she just didn't care. It was rather selfish, but it didn't matter to her right now.

"I feel like I *want* to!" Simba said, suppressing the urge to kick and scream. This was so... unbearable. It wasn't what it was before, but it was still bad. Yet the only question that was still on his mind was this.

Why aren't I dead yet?

"He's getting better," Mufasa explained to Nala and Sarabi outside the den. "At least, that's what a very reliable friend has told me."

"But that doesn't make any sense," Sarabi replied, still unable to comprehend this. Simba was alive, but it seemed like he was still dying. All that pain... Simba looked like he *wanted* to die. "How can he be getting better when he's in so much pain?"

"He *is* getting better," Mufasa insisted. "But at a very slow rate. He seems to be recovering, but it'll take a while for him to fully recover. Two or three weeks, at the most. He'll need to get lots of rest to return to full health."

"So he's not dying?" Nala exclaimed, still not really knowing how to feel. On the one paw, Simba was in an immense amount of pain right now, but on the other paw, he was going to get better in a few weeks or so. She felt sorry for him, but she also felt happy. This was so confusing...

Mufasa nodded in response. "Yes, Nala. He's getting better," he said, unable to hide how pleased he was – so much so that he felt like crying tears of happiness. "But we still have to look after him, until he's back to his good old self."

The three of them smiled, and they couldn't help themselves as they burst into tears simultaneously.

Tama headed back to the spot in the Outlands she had been crying on, and found Tojo sitting there, looking down at the ground.

"Hey," she said, causing him to look up at her.

"Oh," said Tojo, a smile on his face. "Hey. Did you do it?" he asked.

Tama knew what he meant. "I've taken care of it."

She sat down in front of him, and they just sat there in awkward silence, staring at each other.

"Tama..." Tojo said, daring to ask her a question he'd had on his mind – ever since she'd left, actually. "Why did you do it?"

Tama glared into his bright, blue eyes, looking like she wasn't happy about it at all. "Don't ask me that," she told him. "Don't."

A look of anger appeared on her face. "*Don't*."

The End

AN: Curious, no? Simba didn't die, but he's not exactly the picture of health. I wonder how this is going to affect him in future stories. Well, next time, you just might find out...

NEXT TIME: Still recovering from his life-threatening illness, Simba tells Nala a scary story about someone called the Royal Reaper. However, when it turns out that the mythical killer is real, Nala is taken hostage. Can Simba save her even though he can barely walk?